

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 /051 W

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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9316

INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TOKYO 4706

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, JA

SUBJ: APRIL 13 LOCAL ELECTIONS AND MILI PROSPECTS

REF: TOKYO 4283; TOKYO 3685

SUMMARY: IN APRIL 13 UNIFIED LOCAL ELECTION, PRIME MINISTER MIKI FACES FIRST NATIONAL ELECTORAL TEST SINCE HIS SURPRISE ASSUMPTION OF OFFICE IN DECEMBER 1974. WHILE WE EXPECT CONSERVATIVES TO INCUR SOME LOSSES, MAJOR SETBACK DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY, AND THERE IS EVEN CHANCE THEY MAY GAIN SURPRISE GUBERNATORIAL WIN IN OSAKA OR TOKYO. AS RESULT MIKI'S HOLD ON PARTY LEADERSHIP IS NOT LIKELY TO BE IMMEDIATELY CHALLENGED, AND HE WILL PROBABLY BE ABLE TO PUSH FOR GENERAL ELECTION AS EARLY AS JUNE OR JULY TO ESTABLISH POPULAR MANDATE WHICH WOULD FURTHER STRENGTHEN HIS HAND WITHIN LDP. END SUMMARY.

1. ON APRIL 13, JAPANESE WILL ELECT 17 PREFECTURAL GOVERNORS, MAYORS IN 3 LARGE CITIES, AND PREFECTURAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS IN 44 PREFECTURES. ELECTION IS FIRST MAJOR TEST OF STRENGTH
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FOR POLITICAL PARTIES SINCE 1974 UPPER HOUSE CONTEST. RE-

SULTS WILL BE INTERPRETED AS MEASURE OF POPULAR SUPPORT FOR PRIME MINISTER MIKI, AS EVIDENCE OF EXTENT TO WHICH LDP HAS OR HAS NOT CHENCKED LONGTERM TREND OF OPPOSITION ELECTION VICTORIES AT LOCAL LEVEL, AND AS INDICATOR OR PROBABLE OUTCOME IN NEXT GENERAL ELECTION. SUCH ASSESSMENTS, IN TURN, WILL INFLUENCE TIMING OF NEXT GENERAL ELECTION AND COULD LEAD TO SHUFFLE OF CURRENT MIKI CABINET (REFTELS).

2. GOING INTO ELECTION, CONSERVATIVES SEEM RECONCILED TO NOTION THAT THEY WILL EXPERIENCE SOME LOSSES IN GUBERNATORIAL AND OTHER CONTESTS. AT SAME TIME, THEY DO NOT ANTICIPATE SERIOUS SETBACK AND BELIEVE THERE IS CHANCE THAT THEY MIGHT EVEN BE ABLE TO CLAIM VICTORY. GUARDED OPTIMISM DERIVES, IN PART, FROM PERCEPTION THAT PUBLIC DISCONTENT OVER ECONOMIC SITUATION HAS TAPERED OFF WITH SLOWING OF INFLATION RATE AND THAT SPECTER OF RECESSION WILL CAUSE VOTERS TO TURN TOWARD, RATHER THAN AWAY FROM, CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT. THEY ALSO THINK THAT MIKI HAS SUCCESSFULLY PROJECTED APPEARANCE OF CONCERN, SINCERITY, AND DESIRE FOR REFORM AND THAT, BECAUSE PEOPLE DO JUDGE BY APPEARANCES, BATTERED LDP IMAGE HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT REFURBISHED. THEY ARE FURTHER ENCOURAGED BY UNBROKEN STRING OF CONSERVATIVE VICTORIES IN LOCAL ELECTIONS ALREADY HELD THIS YEAR. IN BRIEF, THEY THINK, (OR HOPE) THAT, FOLLOWING TANAKA DEBACLE, LDP DECLINE HAS REACHED BOTTOM AND UPTURN IS COMING.

3. OPPOSITION PARTIES, OF COURSE, WANT TO RESTORE MOMENTUM TO TRNED OF REFORMIST EXPANSION AND THEY TALK OF "ENCIRCLING" GOVERNMENT WITH REFORMIST PREFECTURAL ADMINISTRATIONS AND OF MOVING ON FROM LOCAL TO NATIONAL VICTORIES. THEY COULD HAVE SOME SUCCESS IN THAT ENDEAVOR, ESPECIALLY IF CONSERVATIVES HAVE MISSED WITH ESTIMATES THAT PUBLIC DISCONTENT HAS DIMISNISHED AND THAT MIKI IMAGE WILL FOSTER ELECTORAL SUPPORT. HOWEVER, OPPOSITION DISUNITY IS AGAIN MUCH IN EVIDENCE, AND THEY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO PUT TOGETHER FOUR-PARTY FRONTS FOR GUBERNATORIAL CAMPAIGNS ONLY IN KANAGAWA, CHIBA AND SAGA. OPPOSITION COMBINATIONS VARY IN OTHER LOCATIONS. IN SOME PLACES DSP IS BACKING CONSERVATIVES, AND IN SEVERAL PLACES JSP AND JCP ARE BACKING COMPETING CANDIDATES (MOST NOTABLY IN OSAKA). BELOW GUBER-
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NATORIAL LEVEL, EACH PARTY IS WORKING HARD TO EXPAND STRENGTH IN LOCAL ASSEMBLIES.

4. DRAWING HEAVILY ON SOLID REPORTING BY CONSTITUENT POSTS, OUR ESTIMATE OF ELECTION OUTCOME IS THAT LDP WILL FARE REASONABLY WELL. IN TOKYO, ISHIHARA BOOM DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE DEVELOPED, AND REFORMIST INCUMBENT MINOBE LOOKS LIKE WINNER BY ABOUT 4-3 MARGIN, BUT ELECTION COULD BE CLOSE ONE.

IN OSAKA, HOWEVER, WHILE PRESS GIVES EDGE TO JCP- BACKED INCUMBENT KURODA, CONGEN KOBE BELIEVES THERE IS GOOD CHANCE CONSERVATIVE YUKAWA MAY SCORE UPSET WIN. WE SHARE THAT VIEW. IN REMAINING 15 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS, CONSENSUS IS THAT CONSERVATIVES ARE SAFE IN ALL BUT HOKKAIDO, CHIBA, KANAGAWA AND SAGA. OUR CONSULS, HOWEVER, THINK THAT CONSERVATIVES WILL SQUEEZE BY IN HOKKAIDO AND WIN "BY WHISKER" IN SAGA. IN TOKYO AREA, CHIBA APPEARS TO BE TOSS-UP, WHILE KANAGAWA IS ALMOST CERTAIN TO GO TO REFORMISTS. IN SHORT, CONSERVATIVE PROSPECTS RANGE FROM 11 WINS (WORST CASE) TO 15 WINS (BEST CASE).

5. NO CHANGE IS EXPECTED IN SAPPORO, KAWASAKI AND YOKOHAMA MAYORAL ELECTIONS (ONE CONSERVATIVE, TWO REFORMISTS). NOR ARE MAJOR SHIFTS ANTICIPATED IN LOCAL ASSEMBLY CONTESTS, ALTHOUGH CONSERVATIVES ARE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE SOME SLIPPAGE.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TOKYO 4706

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

6. ELECTION RESULT IS SEEN BY POLITICAL OBSERVERS AS TEST OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PRIME MINISTER MIKI AND, IN TURN, OF HIS CREDENTIALS AS PARTY LEADER. IT WILL PROBABLY INFLUENCE HIS DECISION AS TO TIMING OF GENERAL ELECTIONS, AN ELECTION

HE VERY MUCH WANTS TO HOLD AT EARLY DATE IN ORDER TO PLACE STAMP OF LEGITIMACY ON HIS ASSUMPTION OF PRIME MINISTER'S POST. IT COULD, ALONG WITH OTHER DEVELOPMENTS, ALSO TEMPT OR DISCOURAGE OTHER LDP POWER CONTENIRS TO ATTEMPT TO UNSEAT HIM. PRIMARY MEASURING ROD FOR SUCCESS OR FAILURE BY LDP (AND MILI) IS OUTCOME OF GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS. "SUCCESS" IS HARD TO DEFINE, BUT IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND THAT CONSERVATIVES HOLD 15 OF 17 GUBERNATORIAL SEATS (EXCEPTIONS ARE TOKYO AND OSAKAL) GOING INTO ELECTION. LDP SECGEN NAKASONE HAS SAID 12 VICTORIES (NOT LOSS OF THREE) WOULD CONSTITUTE SUCCESS. WE THINK HE WOULD BE HARD-PRESSED TO DEFEND THIS PROPOSITION.

7. THREE GENERAL SCENARIOS SEEM LIKELY DEPENDING ON OUTCOME OF ELECTION:

(A) LDP WINS BIG, CAPTURING TOKYO AND/OR OSAKA AND ALL
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BUT 1 OR 2 OF REMAINING 15 GUBERNATORIAL POSTS. MIKI, HIS PRESTIGE ENHANCED AND PARTY LEADERSHIP ROLE STRENGTHENED, MOVES TO DISSOLVE DIET IN MAY OR JUNE (DEPENDING ON NEED FOR EXTENSION TO HANDLE LEGISLATIVE BILLS) AND CALLS FOR GENERAL ELECTION IN JUNE OR JULY. LDP WINS ELECTION, MIKI SHAPES CABINET MORE TO HIS "REFORMIST" LIKING AND PRESUMABLY GREATER POPULAR APPEAR. BEFORE IMPERIAL VISIT, HE TRAVELS TO U.S. AS FRESHLY ENDORSED HEAD OF WINNING TEAM.

(B) ELECTION RESULTS ARE INCONCLUSIVE. LDP WINS NEITHER TOKYO NOR OSAKA, AND LOSES 2 OR 3 OTHER CONTESTS, ENDING UP WITH 12 OR 13 GUBERNATORIAL POSTS. PARTY CLAIMS "VICTORY". MIKI ARGUES THAT LDP DID NOT HOLD 2 MAJOR CITIES ANYWAY AND THAT, GIVEN ANTI-LDP MOOD IN RECENT YEARS, SOME LOSSES WERE INEVITABLE. HE CLAIMS THAT MAJOR SETBACK WAS AVERTED AND THAT RESULTS WOULD HAVE BEEN WORSE UNDER ANY OTHR PARTY LEADER. MIKI THEN CALLS FOR EARLY GENERAL ELECTION, BUT OBTAINS ACQUIESENCE OF OPPOSING FACTION LEADERS ONLY BY CONCESSIONS RE FUTURE CABINET LINEUP AND PERHAPS ON LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS. OR ALTERNATIVELY, HE DEFERS ELECTION UNTIL NOVEMBER. OPPONENTS IN PARTY CLAIM HIS PERFORMANCE WAS INADEQUATE, BUT CANNOT FIND ENOUGH IN LOCAL ELECTION RESULT TO CHALLENGE HIM. IN EITHER EVENT, MIKI RETAINS HOLD ON PARTY LEADERSHIP POST.

(C) LDP GOES DOWN TO DEFEAT. NOT ONLY DO REFORMISTS KEEP CONTROL OF TOKYO AND OSAKA, BUT WIN 4 OR 5 OTHER GUBERNATORIAL RACES AS WELL. MIKI DROPS PLAN FOR GENERAL ELECTION THIS SUMMER AND DEFERS IT UNTIL NOVEMBER OR EVENNEXT YEAR. HE TURNS TOWARD PUSHING REFORM BILLS IN DIET IN EFFORT TO RECOUP LOST PRESTIGE, PROBABLY ENCOUNTERING ROUGH GOING

FROM INTRA-PARTY OPPONENTS IN PROCESS. FACTION LEADERS PRESSURE HIM TO RESHUFFLE CABINET, GIVING HIM EVEN LESS VOICE IN DETERMINING NEW LINE-UP. MIKI REMAINS IN OFFICE, BUT HIS LONGER TERM SURVIVAL PROSPECTS BECOME MORE QUESTIONABLE.

8. COMMENT: WE DO NOT SEE LDP AND MIKI SUFFERING MAJOR DEFEAT IN APRIL 13 ELECTION. INDEED, EVEN IF LOSSES OCCUR ELSEWHERE, WE THINK CONSERVATIVES HAVE GOOD CHANCE OF UP-SETTING PROGNOSTICATORS WITH WIN IN OSAKA OR EVEN TOKYO. CONFIDENTIAL

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MOST LIKELY RESULT, HOWEVER, SEEMS TO BE INCONCLUSIVE ONE, WHICH LDP WILL NO DOUBT DESCRIBE AS "VICTORY". IN CONSEQUENCE, MIKI'S PARTY LEADERSHIP ROLE WILL FACE NO IMMEDIATE CHALLENGE AND, SHOULD HE DECIDE TO DO SO, HE WILL PROBABLY BE ABLE TO CALL EARLY GENERAL ELECTION. SHOESMITH

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